



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

The relationship between architectural history and the studio:

Citation for published version:

Stewart, M 2008, 'The relationship between architectural history and the studio: a survey of staff opinion in the six Scottish schools of architecture', *Architectural Heritage*, vol. XVII, pp. 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/E1350752408000058>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3366/E1350752408000058](https://doi.org/10.3366/E1350752408000058)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Architectural Heritage

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



The Relationship between Architectural History and the Studio: A survey of staff opinion in the six Scottish schools of architecture

This paper explores the relationship between architectural history and theory teaching and the studio design project. It reports the results of twelve interviews conducted with one studio tutor and one history and theory teacher at each of the six architecture schools in Scotland.¹

INTRODUCTION

As experienced teachers we had begun to question whether architectural history was being integrated into the studio design project which forms the core of architectural learning and teaching. Our approach addressed the following assumptions and issues: architectural history is self-evidently an architectural (as well as an historical) discipline; history can have a deeper role in students' learning and creativity, but until a means of realising this is found, then it will continue to be regarded by some design tutors as tangential to the studio. The results of the interviews described here provide evidence for and against further integration, what factors might enhance such integration, and the inherent difficulty of describing the relationships and processes involved in creative learning.

Prior to the surveys we prepared a literature review. This was published in *Transactions*, the online journal of the Centre for Education and the Built Environment in 2007.² The literature disclosed the scarcity of research in this field and the failure to fundamentally tackle the issue of integration successfully. We read about forty works of which we cited twenty nine in our published essay. Our selection focused on the last twenty-five years but concentrated on the last ten years, a period when earlier changes in architectural history education were consolidated. The most important publications on this subject have been the studies of Hardy and Teymur. A leading series on this subject is still the essays published by the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians in 2002 to 2003 subsequent to the Society's symposium held in 1967 that discussed 'the methods and content of an architectural history appropriate for future architects' and where the participating historians 'scrutinized the interdependence of history and design'.³ The essays described the history of history education in schools of architecture all over the world. Titles such as 'History Theory Design: a pedagogy of persuasion',⁴ 'Architectural History in Schools of Architecture',⁵ 'Teaching Architectural History in France: A Shifting Institutional

Landscape'⁶ seemed initially promising as did the essays collected by Hardy and Teymur for their book, *Architectural History and the Studio*⁷ which included 'Teaching First Year: What Do They Need to Know?'⁸ and 'Nothing Will Come of Nothing'.⁹ Disappointingly all these proved to be largely anecdotal accounts or historical or contemporary narratives of educational methods. Almost all of them were short on analysis of learning processes.

To complete the programme of research we also ran a blind trial of a new method to improve student integration of history learning in the fourth year design project in the architecture school at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA). The findings demonstrated that history can be utilised successfully and visibly in the design project. The trial was presented in a series of case studies of students' work entitled 'Using History and Theory for Creative Thinking in the Studio' at the EAAE conference in Belgium in 2006, and will be published in the conference proceedings in due course.¹⁰

The staff survey discussed here provides more detailed and systematic information than has been available until now. The staff interviewees were asked for suggestions for integrating history in designing. A recurrent theme for history and studio teachers was how the dominance of Modernism and the rise of architectural history post-WWII have distanced the two disciplines. History teaching's replacement with structuralist theory that focuses on historiographical abstractions, hermeneutics, topoi, etc., is another threat. Traditional history and theory learning is not oppositional to novelty in design but essential to it. History also conveys knowledge and objective ways of thinking – a bedrock upon which fashion styles and the fluctuating uncertainties of contemporary culture can be evaluated: for it is, as Outram says, 'the knowledge that remains when the theory is discarded.'¹¹

Three design tutors did not see the need for the further integration of history, but three believe that its validity demands a more explicit relationship with designing. Only two design tutors were able to explain or define history as having anything more than a general educational value. The survey suggested that one cause of this is the lecture room being seen as the domain of passive learning, while the studio is that of creativity. Most troubling of all is the waste of learning implicit in the findings.

WHO TEACHES WHAT AND WHERE?

The six design tutors teach a wide range of architectural disciplines including environment, structures, history, landscape design, etc. whereas the six historians stick closely to their own subject areas; only two also teach conservation theory. One school is exceptional – history is not delivered in exclusive courses; there is no architectural historian on the staff, and the (largely) theory courses are co-ordinated by a philosophy graduate with a postgraduate degree in architecture.¹²

Some schools favour integrated courses – for instance, philosophy and urban design are taught in conjunction with the design project. One historian commented that studio staff preferred to have architects who could teach history and he often felt excluded from aspects

of the programme. However, only one of the six historians does not attend studio crits and reviews. A historian from the school with the greatest number of historians (four full-time staff) was unequivocal about their freedom to attend studio at any time. Only one history tutor (also a design tutor and year leader) accompanied students on study tours abroad, while all six design tutors did so.

Three historians at three different schools felt they had no time to see students individually as the studio tutors do. Only one school teaches architectural history as an independent discipline. The remaining five schools adapt to students' needs. Two design tutors in these five schools, specifically mentioned choosing sites in their cities for the design projects where history's relevance was demonstrated through research into the locality, and by contextualising the students' designs.

HISTORY — RELEVANT TO STUDIO, OR NOT?

While only one history tutor adapted his courses to the studio, four of the six studio tutors said they favoured altering history courses to improve the relevance of history, but neither group attempted to relate the design project to historical material. One design tutor felt relevance was not the issue, rather, 'it's about making it richer'¹³ and the only theory tutor argued that 'historical examples, along with contemporary examples' are the basis for 'theoretical positions'.¹⁴

One historian felt there was no need to make history more relevant,¹⁵ while one design tutor said it might be having a 'deadening' effect, reflected in students choosing non-history courses at honours level.¹⁶ Even in schools with strong history teaching, two design tutors argued for stronger relevance, to avoid students' responding with 'history is boring',¹⁷ a view endorsed by one design tutor who said many students say 'history is bunk' and that the only interesting history is after the 19th century.¹⁸ Even where history in local sites is relevant, one historian felt his potential to contribute was overlooked.¹⁹

One studio tutor thought history was undermined by being a 'caricature of history, a history of dates and styles . . . rather than a critical discipline'.²⁰ For him, history taught in survey courses inhibited the imaginative engagement essential for studio work.²¹ For one design tutor, who also teaches history, the increased output of historical material was difficult to encompass and consequently, he was concerned that the content of his courses was insubstantial.²²

One major theme was the tension between designing and studying. Almost equal numbers of historians (four) and studio tutors (three) agreed the independence of history from the studio was important so that it was not seen as serving a particular programme or idea.²³ Two design tutors felt history's potential in the design project was not achieved because of the way it is taught and its confinement to its own discipline. One history lecturer noticed 'visible' history learning when material from his lecture on Soane appeared in the design work.²⁴ All the interviewees agreed that students respond better to Modernism

than to the Renaissance,²⁵ for example, one historian commented: 'If you're talking about Neutra . . . it's history that is still perceived to be sexy'.²⁶

The Mackintosh School in Glasgow offered us their student feedback. 82% of the first-year students said history was relevant to their course, increasing to 93% and 90% in the second and third years respectively; with 83% of third years wishing it was yet more relevant. Unfortunately no similar figures are available for other schools of architecture. However, our survey of fourth-year ECA students, carried out in conjunction with this study, suggests they doubt history's value, though its relevance varies, depending on how quickly they want design results.

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF HISTORY

In our staff survey, the six history tutors consider design, history and theory, and environment and structures as the learning disciplines of architecture. Five of the six thought design was the core of architectural education, while the sixth valued history above design because it confers 'skills in research, presentation, writing and critical reflection'.²⁷

The six design tutors mentioned history's value in improving writing and research skills, and one asserted that history could impact on the design project if different strategies were employed but he did not suggest what these should be.²⁸

WHAT ROLE, IF ANY, HAS HISTORY IN THE STUDIO?

One historian commented that history's only positive value was to give students a break from studio,²⁹ a view expressed, though less sardonically, by two other historians and two design tutors, who felt history is tangential to studio and that its core function should be 'in the service of design . . . which is architecture'.³⁰ A history teacher, in a school where history was well received by his design colleagues, commented that it is 'basically knowledge about all architecture's [past]' and that it is ' . . . not a theoretical science but . . . is based on experience'.³¹ He referred also to the negative associations history acquired during the early Modern Movement³² when, arguably, architecture was plunged into a disorientating amnesia that delayed the emergence of new approaches in architectural historiography in studio learning. Only one other history lecturer, who is an architect and studio teacher, held similar views.³³

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'HISTORY'?

One design tutor noted his dislike of the word 'history', arguing that what it really means is 'to go out into the world'.³⁴ The six design tutors claimed they refer students to history 'extremely regularly',³⁵ or that up to 50% of their contact with students was about history.³⁶ However, overall for five of the six history meant the Modern Movement, with only one mentioning the Renaissance.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND THE STUDIO

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A ROLE FOR HISTORY IN DESIGN?

All interviewees were asked what the historian needs to know to teach architecture students. Two design tutors thought the historians should work on a design to know about art, inspiration and to experience what it is like *not* knowing the solution to a design problem,³⁷ because every teacher needs to appreciate how their students will use the information they impart.³⁸ One historian (in a school with a minimal history staff) felt he had no time to attend critics and colleagues' lectures, whereas the four historians in a school with strong history teaching, rotated tasks such as directors of studies, running recruitment days, and sharing responsibility for the history and theory courses.³⁹ Four schools employ art historians with a specialism in architectural history to deliver history and theory. One theory lecturer thought this inappropriate while one design tutor thought history's role would be evident if architects taught the history and theory.⁴⁰ We found no evidence that the four art historians had inappropriate knowledge, and three of them emphasised the importance of knowing the design task.

WHY DOES HISTORY FAIL TO PLAY A PART IN DESIGN?

Two designers in our survey felt history was 'labouring' under 'historical agendas',⁴¹ and it inhibited creativity. One school had dropped history courses and taught only theory in humanities seminars (without lectures); and the feedback from students had been 'extremely positive'.⁴²

The two schools with the strongest history reported their design tutors were aware and interested in the history taught, despite misgivings about the content or emphases given. Schools with just basic history provision reported a lack of awareness of history content and that some design tutors 'have no interest in history'.⁴³ One historian in a different school argued that design tutors' lack of awareness of what students learn in history was not entirely the tutors' fault as students can be 'so blank' when asked about this.⁴⁴ Five history tutors felt that full-time design tutors are aware but that part-time visiting architects were less aware of contemporary history teaching methods.

THE VALUE OF WIDER DISCIPLINES

We asked the twelve interviewees to prioritise the usefulness of non-historical subjects from a suggested list. Five design tutors specifically favoured contemporary art, followed by philosophy and theory of architecture, then by social/political issues. Two of those five found it difficult to say which was of greater value, some projects such as social housing, might demand inclusion of social and political issues. One design tutor thought the local art resources should be exploited but that choices have to be made.

The six historians came up with almost entirely opposite results: five valued the philosophy and theory of architecture most highly for lectures and seminars; next, with

only a slightly lower score of four in favour, was social/political issues, and only one valued studying contemporary art.

IMPROVING INTEGRATION AND RELEVANCE

Two design tutors think history does not happen in the studio because students don't think it can, because they think 'it's ancient architecture and has nothing to do with their designs'.⁴⁵ Our survey (prior to this staff survey) of our own students suggested four ways of approaching the problem of poorly integrated learning, and we put these to the twelve interviewees. We feel that our fourth suggestion, below, has the greatest potential.

1) Take history out of the lecture room

One design tutor said relevance should be tackled by local studies that present the architecture of place and memory; from this, one could then identify dominant past ideologies, such as Modernism.⁴⁶ Nearly all the design tutors agreed that site visits are better than classroom teaching.⁴⁷ However, the six historians and theory teachers argued that although experiential learning plays a part in understanding the built environment, it is 'slow learning' and cannot deliver the saturation learning that is a core strength of lecture-based courses. One design tutor suggested getting students to 'go out into the city and produce a document – a portfolio of images/drawings/photos and about 1000 words . . . on a design work'.⁴⁸ Several interviewees specifically mentioned the importance students attach to seeing the historian attending reviews.⁴⁹ One historian described a collaborative, team-teaching experiment where technology, history and design teachers delivered the same classes together but this had proved to be time consuming and was abandoned.⁵⁰

2) Think across disciplines

Two historians thought that typological studies would help thinking across disciplines. In one case, where the project was a design for shopping, the historian suggested that the 'students look at Leeds, and at arcades and covered markets in the Islamic world'.⁵¹ The second historian felt that emphasising social and political content allowed connections to be made, so his Renaissance course 'is partly theoretical and partly to do with building types'.⁵²

Some practical solutions had been tried such as slanting lectures to what's happening in studio and having history and theory staff assess students' design diaries,⁵³ however, modularisation inhibited the flexibility of courses.⁵⁴

One historian worked with the first year co-ordinator, who felt every history lecture should refer to contemporary architecture,⁵⁵ while another historian, at a different school, set the architecture and architectural history undergraduates to collaborate in the design of an eighteenth-century French *hôtel*.⁵⁶

3) *Keep the disciplines separate but alter the content
and emphases*

All the schools we surveyed demonstrated this by encouraging at least one course to back up the studio project, for instance, 'Urbanism, the development of the city', was taught in one school to suit developing studio projects in all years.⁵⁷ One architect teaches his history and theory classes by speaking about history as architects do.⁵⁸ This approach may be apt for a studio teacher who crosses the disciplines anyway, and who feels that his students do not make such sharp distinctions between the disciplines.

4) *Get students to think creatively about history*

We would argue that the greatest challenge for the historian is to lead students to find creative solutions in their history learning. One example of this is Patrick Berger's reuse and conversion of the obsolete 1858 Bastille Railway viaduct in Paris to a shopping precinct and garden promenade. The elevation of the viaduct had originally been conceived in imitation of the traditional brick and stone construction of 16th-century Paris buildings. Retaining this for the shop conversions provided a coherent image upon which he imposed traditional French formal planning; the top of the viaduct became an urban promenade with extending vistas and gardens.⁵⁹ Berger's ingenuity reflects the vigorous French tradition of integrating history, theory and practice. Outcomes such as Berger's are unlikely in Scotland because the national architecture has a controversial historiography and is incomplete. This makes its relationship with present-day practice very difficult to explain to the student. The risk is that history becomes historicism, or is reduced to teaching architects rudimentary research skills in the service of possible future practice.

Returning to our findings: when asked if learning from history could be detected in completed projects, one historian interpreted the question in terms of copying, and he hadn't really seen any impact, nor did he know exactly how you would detect it.⁶⁰ Would asking students to relate history and theory to their own project achieve this, we asked? The same interviewee said it would, however, it is how you frame the question that is crucial.⁶¹ Another historian reported he would go to the design tutor for advice on how the history should be used in the design.⁶² One history tutor had invited the design tutor to the students' history tutorial and he noticed the design tutor had made connections that he would not make.⁶³

Five design tutors thought that students could analyse design issues in historic buildings. However, one disagreed, noting that little connection could be made between their history topic and contemporary architectural concerns.⁶⁴ One history tutor, who also teaches design, described his school's method as getting students to build models to 1:50 or 1:25 scale of buildings to understand their context, historical background and from that, 'to abstract it to produce a stronger form',⁶⁵ in order to encourage 'understanding of place and how that informs modern architecture'.⁶⁶ Only two design tutors suggested

applying the methods for analysing design to historic buildings, by asking students to render the historical forms into three-dimensional or graphic abstractions. Two history lecturers encouraged students to interpret history creatively and to think constantly about it in terms of designing,⁶⁷ arguing for its importance to present-day designing.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

This study was an enquiry into the designer's and the scholar's mentality and their different contributions to architectural education. The twelve interviewees highlighted the correspondences and disjunctions between the two fields. Four history teachers felt history is undervalued and under-utilised in architectural education, although only two historians encouraged students to think creatively about history as a source for more subtle and wider frames of reference in problem solving. Overall, the language to describe such a process is limited, subliminal or is unrecognised.

All six studio tutors expressed commitment to history but their answers were either superficial platitudes, policy statements, too general, or evasive in ways that suggest a deeper ambivalence. The general educational value of history teaching and assessment was universally agreed, but whether this is sufficient to guarantee history's continued role in design schools is less clear.

Our literature survey found Columbia University was typical of many schools that attempt to overcome the problem by favouring architects to teach history and theory.⁶⁹ It was evident from our reading, and from our own questionnaires, this does not solve the problem of integrating history into design. Our study suggests that the teachers' disciplines are much less important than their educational aims and the skilfulness of their teaching. Another factor is the overemphasis on Modernism and this suggested that the history taught by architecture tutors is conditioned by their own educational background (largely in Modernism) and their dominant concern with the design project. Whereas, history taught by the historian might be wider, more inclusive and recontextualise the orthodoxies, such as Modernism (that is itself now, quite ancient, history).

The question is not whether history should play a more active role in designing but how it can do so. This survey has shown that there is a willingness to improve history's relevance. This requires guiding students to the interpretation of history for designing, otherwise, history and theory will remain tangential to the design project. The challenge is to find a way of making that relationship explicit, viable, teachable and, ultimately, of worth to the architectural student, and to do this without losing history's intrinsic value.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are profoundly grateful to our twelve anonymous interviewees for their time and patience in answering our questions. The research was funded by a grant from Edinburgh College of Art.

NOTES

1. School of Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art; The Mackintosh School of Architecture, The Glasgow School of Art; Department of Architecture and Building Science, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow; Architecture, School of Arts, Culture and Environment, University of Edinburgh; Scott Sutherland School of Architecture, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen; School of Architecture, Faculty of Duncan of Jordanstone College, University of Dundee. The interviews were conducted separately and recorded on audiocassette tapes and transcripts. Profound apologies to the one woman interviewee but everyone is referred to as male in order to preserve anonymity.
2. http://www.cebe.heacademy.ac.uk/transactions/volumes_index.php?edition=4.1, *Transactions*, Volume 4, Issue 1, April 2007, pp. 8–17.
3. Z. Çelik, 'Editor's Concluding Notes', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 62, No. 1, March 2003, p. 122.
4. N. Coleman, 'History Theory Design: a pedagogy of persuasion' *Arq.* Vol. 7, Nos. 3/4, 2003, p. 358.
5. S. Anderson, 'Architectural History in Schools of Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 58, No. 3, September 1999, p. 282.
6. B. Bergdoll and A. Thomine, 'Teaching Architectural History in France: A Shifting Institutional Landscape', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 61, No. 4, December 2002, pp. 515–16.
7. A. Hardy and N. Teymur (eds), *Architectural History and the Studio*, London, 1996.
8. A. Higgott, 'Teaching First Year: What Do They Need to Know?' in A. Hardy and N. Teymur (eds), *Architectural History and the Studio*, London, 1996, p. 184.
9. S. Unwin, 'Nothing Will Come of Nothing' in A. Hardy and N. Teymur (eds), *Architectural History and the Studio*, London, 1996, p. 173.
10. EAAE-ANHSA conference 'Content and Methods of Teaching Architectural Theory in European Schools of Architecture, Hasselt, Belgium, September 2006.
11. J. Outram, 'Architectural Education and the Medium' in A. Hardy and N. Teymur (eds), *Architectural History and the Studio*, London, 1996, p. 99.
12. Response to question 2, Tape 2, 15, 25.
13. Response to question 8, Tape 3, 83.
14. Response to question 15, Tape 2, 444.
15. Response to question 15, Tape 5, 468.
16. Response to question 6, Tape 6, 186.
17. Response to question 19, Tape 10, 575.
18. Response to question 10, Tape 5, 232.
19. Response to question 14b, Tape 5, 330.
20. Response to question 6, Tape 6, 150.
21. Response to question 10, Tape 6, 375. A synopsis of this debate is given at <http://www.wesleyan.edu/histjrn/archives/oct05.html#Moses2>: the web pages of History & Theory.org and in H. White, 'Traumatic Nationalism,

and the Public Role of History' *History and Theory*, Vol. 44, 2005, pp. 311–332, et seq.

22. Response to question 8, Tape 4, 167.
23. Response to question 8, Tape 6, 253.
24. Response to question 10, Tape 5, 45.
25. Response to question 10, Tape 1, 205.
26. Response to question 15, Tape 1, 334.
27. Response to question 5, Transcript 1, p. 1.
28. Response to question 6, Transcript 2, p. 1.
29. Response to question 6, Transcript 1, p. 1.
30. Response to question 6, Tape 2, 88.
31. Response to question 6, Tape 4, 70.
32. Response to question 6, Tape 4, 102.
33. Response to the question 6, Tape 1, 101.
34. Response to question 6, Transcript 2, p. 1.
35. Responses to question 9.
36. Response to question 9, Transcript 2, p. 2.
37. Response to question 19, Transcript 2, p. 3.
38. Response to question 19, Tape 10, 589.
39. Response to question 21, Tape 5, 619.
40. Response to question 21, Tape 2, 567.
41. Response to question 6, Tape 6, 221, 223.
42. Response to question 10, Tape 3, 95.
43. Response to question 12, Tape 1, 234.
44. Response to question 12, Transcript 1, p. 2.
45. Response to question 8, Tape 4, 177.
46. Response to question 6, Tape 10, 80.
47. Response to question 8, Tape 9, 94.
48. Response to question 8, Tape 2, 166.
49. Response to question 9, Transcript 3, p. 4.
50. Response to question 9, Tape 5, 222.
51. Response to question 8, Transcript 1, p. 1.
52. Response to question 20, Tape 7, 295.
53. Response to question 14e, Tape 3, 138.
54. Response to question 14b, Tape 3, 117.
55. Response to question 13, Transcript 1, p. 2.
56. Response to question 3g, Tape 5, 104.
57. Response to question 14d, Tape 9, 195.
58. Response to question 8, Tape 8, 161.
59. M. Meade, 'Parisian Promenade', *The Architectural Review*, no. 1195, September 1996, p. 55.
60. Response to question 17, Tape 7, 243.
61. Response to question 14f, Tape 1, 302.
62. Response to question 14c, Tape 5, 369.
63. Response to question 14c, Tape 5, 371.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND THE STUDIO

- 64. Response to question 14f, Tape 6, side 2, 001.
- 65. Response to question 14f, Tape 10, 363.
- 66. Response to question 14g, Tape 10, 383.
- 67. Response to question 14f, Transcript 3, p. 4.
- 68. Response to question 14a, Tape 2, 359.
- 69. B. Colomina, 'Back to School', *Architectural Design*, Special Issue, 2004, pp. 49–50.

DOL: 10.3366/E1350752408000058